

(Music)

MS. WALLACE: Good morning. I think I put one of these handouts on everybody's table space. Did everyone get one?

Just to look quickly, on the front of it, we have the objectives for our session. And then on the back, I've got some contact information – all the offices that we work with.

And as you can see, I just want to start off. The FLO role in special needs education is one of support. We like to know that if you – we are the first office that you contact. We know the other offices to lead you to.

We also like to look at the overall educational options for your children because it takes a lot of planning. I think Stan said, even for children without special needs, all this moving and new schools takes a lot of planning and it requires a lot of advocacy on your part. That's even more important when you have a child with special needs.

So that's our role. We try to be informed of what the other offices are doing – ECS and Office of Overseas Schools. We work with allowances to try to find out what's available to you as family – families with special needs children.

And we try to provide information to help you be a good advocate for your child. Of course, that's your most important role. And as Arch (sp) and his graph shows, you are – you are able to access a lot of different services within the State Department.

Also, for advocacy, we try to listen to families and understand what issues that we might advocate for future support for you. So we have several Yahoo! groups for family members with special needs, and I've got them on the back of the paper. And we monitor that and listen to families as they tell us what issues they're facing.

The second thing I want to talk about is boarding schools. My role is to try to make contact with lots of boarding schools. I have a lot of boarding school directors come to Washington and come to my office and want to know how they can reach out to Foreign Service families. We try to educate them on some of the special needs that our kids have in terms of learning disabilities, support that we can ask for for your kids. We try to educate them on just some of the transitional problems that our kids have because it is hard to transition – we all know that. It's hard for us; it's hard for our families.

And also, today, in today's world, with so many unaccompanied tours and hardship tours, boarding school is becoming, I think, more attractive to families to provide their kids with continuity in their education,

particularly in the high school years. There are many, many boarding schools out there with great level of support.

Actually, next month I'm going to – with somebody from Stan's office, I'm going to a conference where therapeutic boarding schools will be meeting in Baltimore. And there'll, I think, be about 60 boarding schools represented. And we do what somebody before me – I think it was my predecessor – described as speed dating with boarding schools. (Laughter) And we just go to a hotel and get a big conference room. Everybody sets up. And I, along with a lot of private educational consultants, will go from table to table, trying to introduce our kids and ask them questions about what they can provide. And there are – I know Stan said that it is not easily granted, but the new allowance or the new ability to provide support – financial support to hire an educational consultant is really wonderful. But in the meantime, I've been able to make contact with a lot of educational consultants and do have the ability to call and ask their opinion.

And finally, Family Liaison Office is in the midst of purchasing a database. And this database provides guidance and answers. What you do is – it sounds a little bit like the MCI that Stan was talking about, but we can put in what the needs of your student are, and then we get a list of boarding schools that match. And then, of course, I can give that to you and you can investigate the boarding schools and see which ones you think will work best for your child.

So this is kind of an experiment. I don't even know if I've had a chance to tell the Office of Overseas Schools or ECS, but we just got approval through a (COX ?) funding to purchase this. And I'm going to purchase it – I only have enough money to purchase it for six months – (chuckles) – so if you are – as you're networking and you hear other families that might want to try this tool out, please contact the Family Liaison Office.

Stan also touched on homeschool, and we are happy to help you investigate programs. I know that there are more and more online programs that are offering learning disability classes for kids. And this is really a great resource for some families. We have a lot of people that have had a lot of success with homeschooling, so that's something else we can help you research.

And then transitioning back to D.C., that's a tricky one. We have great services, and, in fact, I think – didn't some of you say that you've had really good services while you were here in the local area?

Q: (Inaudible.)

MS. WALLACE: What county are you in?

Q: Really, northern Arlington.

MS. WALLACE: Arlington? And did you say you had –

Q: Montgomery County.

MS. WALLACE: Montgomery. OK.

So remember that the whole purpose of educational allowances is to provide Foreign Service families with educational resources that are equal to what is available in the public school here. And we do have some fantastic jurisdictions in this area. When I started this job last August, one of my goals was to get out to each jurisdiction and meet the people that are involved when our kids come back from overseas and registering them and assessing their school records and their transcripts, and also, with the special education component of the different jurisdictions.

I know there are also, besides just the speech therapists and occupational there are special ed teachers and resource – resources there are what is called a Parent Resource Center in each of these jurisdictions – Fairfax, Arlington, Montgomery. And that center is set up solely to help parents maneuver through the special Ed services and provide support with IEP interpretation, et cetera. So make use of that. And if you need help in tracking down who to call please let me know and I'll help you do that.

Often when our kids come from overseas schools they don't have IEPs. And so it's very important if you are overseas and your child is getting perhaps some extra tutoring or some kind of special resource, but does not have an IEP, try to bring back as many hand-carried records as you can just to help the school system here. They're going to want to do their own assessment. They're going to want to see what resources are best for your child in their jurisdiction. But the more that you can bring back to show what your child has been receiving, what's worked, what hasn't worked, the smoother the transition will go.

And finally, I just want to point out these different resources. We have a great website with lots of information – any questions?

Q: My son currently has an IEP, he gets – they evaluated and kind of redone – tweaked every year. And while we're in Dublin now it's going to be time for him to have this re-eval to see if he still maintains that IEP. Is that something that can be done overseas or is it something that's only done here?

MS. WALLACE: I think it depends on the post, but –

STAFF: But yeah, that's something that we would work with you on as long as we had something in writing recommending the evaluation. You're – (inaudible) – going to be in Dublin, so there's probably a good possibility that you could go to London. We have some – you know, we need to be sure that the – (inaudible) – that we use to do the evaluations are accredited, you know, and credentialed and are on par with the U.S.

So we do know – we know a really great resource in Paris, as I said, in London. And you can always come back to the States if that becomes your choice. But sometimes people would rather be closer to where they are so that it doesn't affect the child's sleep, you know, I mean, if you're coming all the way back then we'd have to, you know, accommodate for that. But in Dublin we could – we can hook you up in London.

MS. WALLACE: So if a child goes overseas with a current IEP from a county in our area, when that IEP lapses is it automatic to have an assessment?

STAFF: No, we'd have to have something in writing. So the IEP order might say, you know, re-evaluate in one year, you know, or the school. You know something when he's in Dublin and the school might say, well, we need an update for this. You know, as long as we get a recommendation from a professional, whether it be educational or medical, because we can't just go on – we have parents calling a lot, you know, and saying, you know, I think my child has a problem, you know, we want an evaluation.

And probably the parent is right, they're the ones who know the kids the best, but we need to have a professional who is making that recommendation. And it's pretty easy. I've had – where the parent just calls the school and says, hey, could you put this in writing for me because the school benefits from an evaluation so that they have a better idea, you know, what services the child needs.

MS. WALLACE: One other –

STAFF: (Inaudible.)

MS. WALLACE: I'm sorry. Don?

STAFF: IEPs, though, are somewhat unique to the United States. So if you go to a place where there might be American-trained educators they'll have familiarity with IEPs perhaps. But it doesn't necessarily mean that the school has familiarity with what an IEP is. And there's not obligation for the school, in a legal sense, to follow through with the IEP just because it might have been established, let's say, in Fairfax County.

So the school hopefully will develop what they need to develop, which might correspond with what's in the IEP, but people have to remember that the IEP in the United States is backed by law and the school systems as a consequence are compelled legally to fulfill the requirements of an IEP, whereas those standards don't exist overseas, all right?

Q: Yes.

MS. WALLACE: That's a very good point. Yeah, the overseas schools are independent schools. So they are not required to follow an IEP.

STAFF: And we look at the – if you read the regulations it says that an IEP or equivalent – (inaudible) – most places overseas don't. So we look at the equivalent, actually, as usually the evaluation because the evaluation will have, at the end, you know, a number of recommendations which very much correspond with what an IEP might, you know, recommend. So that's usually – or it could be from the school – but that's usually what we consider equivalent to an IEP.

MS. WALLACE: Thank you.

Q: So, aside from the IEP, how are you all seeing response to intervention as that goes forward and – (inaudible) – response to intervention plan maybe – (inaudible) – the same as an IEP?

STAFF: Yes, Diane (ph), because they don't have an IEP because of the – because of overseas – (inaudible) – again, overseas – (audio break) – private schools and the majority – (audio break) – do not do – (audio break) – so we can't say you have to have an IEP in order to access the special needs – (audio break) – then they don't do – (audio break) – but if children are – (audio break) – right.

Q: In the States, a child's functioning as a response to intervention. They're getting the same resources, more or less than a child – (audio break) – functioning under – (inaudible). What is – I guess I don't – (audio break) – (inaudible) –

STAFF: Yeah. The law in the U.S. now is that you must try various – (audio break) – formally label a child and develop an IEP. So – (audio break) – it would be – you know, there are various things that are – (audio break) – am I correct? How – (audio break) –

Q: The – (audio break) – reauthorization of IEAA (ph) – (audio break) – you have to take more steps – (audio break) – to get your children in the – (inaudible) – prior to the IEP process. So even before you do an – psycho-educational evaluation, you're supposed to have – (audio break) – gone through the – (audio break) – varying – (audio break) – exhaustive process of trying different combinations of – (audio break) – trying different approaches to see if the child responds – (inaudible) – (audio break) – difference in learning, difference – (inaudible) – small group. And – (audio break) – so we – (audio break) – seen children – and my child was a case where my child never has functioned under an IEP, though my child's been functioning under a RTI since 2004, 2005.

MS. WALLACE: So –

STAFF: This is not a concept that will be familiar in the international schools at all.

MS. WALLACE: But –

Q: No, but I was checking in terms of funding.

STAFF: Yeah, well, I mean, that's something that basically ECS has to decide. But it's kind of like either the child is eligible or is not eligible for the special needs allowance. I mean the social worker – (audio break) –

Q: But as the social worker –

MS. WALLACE: And –

STAFF: Yeah, so we just had that each case individually and we'd have to look at the information that we get from the school. And what kind of interventions – (audio break) – things – (audio break) – done, because it could be interventions that were done, you know, without having to have a – (inaudible) – an allowance, you know.

So we would just have to work with you individually to what does your child need, right? And now – and then – and then sort of go from there, you know: Does your child need this extra funding? And it might – you know, sometimes the accommodations are, you know, sitting close up in the classroom or, you know, certain cues or, you know, that maybe you don't really need the funding for – we just need to be sure that the school overseas will accommodate that. And – (inaudible). So we would just have to work – and basically, answer is, it's an individual basis. You know, like they said, this, I guess, is a new concept – you know, the regulations – (inaudible) – IEP or – (inaudible).

MS. WALLACE: Well, and, Ellen, I think it's just perhaps a new name on a report that you would have looked at anyway if it was an IEP or a RTI. It's still a school-issued report that lets you know what some of the special need are.

STAFF: And Stan's not here, but I'll speak for Stan and the rest of the office. We'll bend over backwards to do what we need to do to provide assistance for kids – period. So you can read into that however you want to – (inaudible).

MS. WALLACE: Another resource that I put on the back of this sheet is the CLO. And I don't think it was mentioned earlier. But the CLO at each post can be contacted; the email address is CLO whatever the city is at state.gov. And they often, also, are a good provider of information about who is at the post now in terms of – speech therapy was an example given earlier – where Pam and Stan both knew a great speech therapist at one post.

But, again, a lot of these resources, they are also internationally mobile and so they might not be there. So always try to remember to contact the CLO also. And as early as when you're bidding – if you're looking at the bidding tools that are available, please include the CLO.

Any other questions? Well, thank you very much.

STAFF: Thank you (inaudible).

(Applause)

(END)